

Roosevelt, Franklin Delano

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 32d president of the United States (1933-45), greatly expanded the role of the federal government with a wide-ranging economic and social program, the New Deal, designed to counter the Great Depression of the 1930s. He also led the nation through most of its participation in the global struggle of World War II.

EARLY LIFE

Of Dutch and English ancestry, Roosevelt was born on Jan. 30, 1882, at Hyde Park, N.Y., to James Roosevelt, scion of a noted, wealthy family, and his second wife, Sara Delano Roosevelt. Franklin led a sheltered youth, educated by governesses, his life revolving about the Hyde Park family estate in rural Dutchess County, trips to Europe, athletics (especially swimming and boating), and hobbies, such as stamp and bird collecting. Although he cherished fun and companionship, he rarely confided his innermost thoughts, perhaps as a device for evading his mother's attempts at domination.

At the exclusive Groton School (Groton, Mass.), Franklin was imbued with a sense of social responsibility. He was an average student at Harvard University, edited the Harvard Crimson in his senior year, and after graduation (1903) attended (1904-07) Columbia Law School. He dropped out of law school upon admission to the New York bar and worked (1907-10) for a Wall Street law firm.

Tall, handsome, athletic, and outgoing, Franklin married a distant cousin, a shy young woman, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, on Mar. 17, 1905. Her uncle, President Theodore ROOSEVELT, gave the bride away. Their children were Anna Eleanor, James, Elliott, Franklin Delano, Jr., and John; a sixth child died in infancy. The Roosevelts were active in New York social circles but at the same time devoted considerable energy to the plight of the less fortunate. Franklin's handling of small-claims cases in the municipal court system deepened his concern for the common people. Although a Democrat, he admired the progressivism of Uncle Teddy and decided early upon a political career. His opportunity came in 1910 when Dutchess County Republicans split between old guard conservatives and progressives. A colorful, dynamic campaigner, Roosevelt toured dirt roads in an open red Maxwell automobile, soliciting the votes of normally Republican farmers, and won a seat as a Democrat in the New York state senate.

RISE TO NATIONAL PROMINENCE

Roosevelt gained quick recognition by his leadership of upstate New York Democrats in a fight against Tammany Hall's nominee for the U.S. Senate. At the 1912 Democratic National Convention he backed Woodrow Wilson in a bitter contest for the party's presidential nomination and was subsequently awarded the post of assistant secretary of the navy (serving 1913-20). He gained considerable administrative experience under his superior, Josephus DANIELS, a progressive North Carolina newspaper editor, and made a reputation as a jingoist and an advocate of navy interests. Some of the Wilsonians, however, viewed Roosevelt as dandified and superficial, a characterization that plagued him in later years.

The Roosevelt name and his progressive image won him the party's vice-presidential nomination in 1920 on the ticket with the conservative newspaper publisher Gov. James M. COX of Ohio. The Democrats had little hope of victory. Americans, tired of war and Europe's problems, opted for Warren G. Harding's promise of a "return to normalcy." Roosevelt's campaign, regarded as a sacrificial gesture, was highlighted by a vigorous defense of Wilson's advocacy of U.S. membership in the League of Nations.

In the summer of 1921, while vacationing at his summer home on Campobello Island (New Brunswick, Canada), Roosevelt was stricken with poliomyelitis. Recovery was slow, and the family's wealth appeared adequate to allow him a genteel retirement to the Hyde Park estate, a course urged by his mother. Instead, encouraged by Eleanor and by advisor Louis McHenry Howe, Roosevelt slowly regained his aspirations for public office, although he permanently lost the use of his legs. Intensive therapy, including swimming, hastened partial physical recovery. At the Democratic National Convention of 1924, Roosevelt signaled his return to politics with the Happy Warrior speech that placed Gov. Alfred E. SMITH of New York in nomination for the presidency. When Smith finally secured the nomination in 1928, he persuaded Roosevelt to run for the New York governorship. Smith's identification with New York City's Tammany Hall was a liability. He hoped that Roosevelt's appeal to Protestant, rural upstate voters would swing the Empire State to him in the presidential contest with the Republican Herbert C. HOOVER.

Although Smith lost his own state and the traditionally Democratic South in the 1928 contest, Roosevelt, proving his

mobility in a strenuous campaign, managed a narrow victory. His governorship was molded in the progressive tradition. Its accomplishments included the development of public power, civil-service reform, and social-welfare measures. In addition, Roosevelt cultivated a presidential image with the help of a loyal group of advisors: Howe was his principal political manager; James A. FARLEY, a Catholic, was assigned the task of winning delegates to the 1932 presidential convention; Henry Morgenthau, Jr. (see MORGENTHAU family), Roosevelt's Hudson Valley neighbor, was an agriculture advisor; Frances PERKINS, industrial commissioner of New York, advised on labor questions and social security; and Samuel I. Rosenman was a speechwriter and confidant. A smashing victory in the 1930 gubernatorial election, the growing appeal of the Roosevelt name as the Great Depression (see DEPRESSION OF THE 1930S) made Hoover politically vulnerable, and identification with both Southern and progressive party elements won Roosevelt the party's 1932 presidential nomination, despite fierce opposition by a conservative coalition headed by Smith.

PRESIDENCY

Roosevelt's opponents claimed that he was intellectually and physically unfit for the presidency. Anxious to belie such charges, he chartered a Ford trimotor airplane and, as a dramatic gesture, flew to Chicago; there, at the Democratic National Convention, he pledged to the American people a NEW DEAL. That expression, symbol of an era in American history, represented a cluster of ideas formulated by the candidate and his BRAIN TRUST, a group of advisors recruited from New York's Columbia University. Faced with the prospect of governing the nation in the worst economic crisis in its history, Roosevelt desired an examination of causes and remedies free from the pressures of a political campaign. The advisory group, organized a few months before the July convention, was unofficially headed by Raymond Moley, a professor of public law, and included Rexford G. TUGWELL, an agricultural economist, and A. A. BERLE, Jr., a specialist in corporate structure and finance. They concluded that the United States had become an interdependent society (a "concert of interests") and that the agricultural depression of the 1920s had brought down the rest of the nation's economic structure. In the Forgotten Man speech drafted by Moley, Roosevelt presented the group's theory that productivity had outpaced the capacity of farmers and laborers to consume. During the campaign he also argued that big business should be accountable to society ("an economic constitutional order") and spoke in favor of conservation, relief, social insurance, and cheaper electricity. The Depression helped give Roosevelt an overwhelming victory in November.

On the eve of the March 1933 inauguration, the nation's banking system collapsed as millions of panicky depositors tried to withdraw savings that the banks had tied up in long-term loans. Approximately 12 to 14 million Americans were unemployed, and business nearly ground to a halt. In ringing tones, Roosevelt told the nation that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself" and promised effective leadership in the crisis. That same day he closed the banks by proclamation, summoned a special session of Congress for the passage of emergency banking legislation, and began the process that within a week provided the liquidity that banks needed in order to reopen. The banks also had to regain public confidence, and in his first "fireside chat" radio broadcast the new president urged the American people to stop hoarding cash. Millions obliged as the self-assured new chief executive offered a vigorous contrast to his dour, embattled predecessor.

THE NEW DEAL

Although Roosevelt's New Deal is frequently described as an improvisation, much of it was planned in advance. His domestic program consistently accorded priority to agricultural recovery, with provision for crop restriction in the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) of 1933 (see AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENT ADMINISTRATION); passage of the Soil Conservation Act of 1935, later expanded in response to the Supreme Court's ruling (1936) against AAA; and the second AAA Act in 1938, which pledged to the nation the maintenance of a large grain reserve. The New Deal also sought to rationalize the business system by temporarily ending bitter economic warfare (the National Industrial Recovery Act and its fair practice codes; see NATIONAL RECOVERY ADMINISTRATION). Unemployment insurance was introduced, and the new social security program guaranteed income for retired Americans. The New Deal also encouraged the growth of industrial unionism, the end of child labor, and maximum hours and minimum wages legislation on a national basis.

The credit of the United States was used to salvage millions of urban home mortgages (Home Owners Loan Corporation) and farms (FARM CREDIT ADMINISTRATION) and to encourage private business by expanding the Reconstruction Finance Corporation that had been established under the Hoover administration. Steps were also taken to promote public construction projects. Roosevelt's attempts at reflation of the currency to 1927-29 price levels led to abandonment of the gold standard in 1933 and reduction of the gold content of the dollar. Although in the 1932 campaign he had promised a balanced budget, Roosevelt showed a greater commitment to his pledge that no American should go hungry. Emergency expenditures for relief, also designed to "prime the economic

pump," poured into the economy through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, later the WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION, leading to record federal deficits.

The TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY, a major New Deal creation that was uniquely Roosevelt's, provided for public development of cheap electrical power. Roosevelt conceived the project in terms of broad regional planning, including scientific farming, development of water transportation, energy, soil conservation, public health and educational facilities, and recreation. He had hoped to extend the concept to other areas of the country but was thwarted by charges of socialism and the declining popularity of the New Deal in the late 1930s. Roosevelt was also deeply committed to the conservation movement and youth employment, both of which found expression through the CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS.

In the 1930s, Roosevelt's foreign policy was subordinated to the needs of internal economic recovery. Despite passage in 1934 of the Trade Agreements Act, which authorized reciprocal tariff reductions, the decade was characterized by international economic warfare. Congress enacted neutrality legislation intended to prevent U.S. involvement in the event of another world war. The president sought to improve relations with Latin America through his GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY. As president, Roosevelt pioneered the political use of radio, frequently addressing the American people in a relaxed, homey manner. His unique political style, charm, and charisma brought him a record four terms. He beat Hoover in 1932, secured an overwhelming landslide victory over Alfred M. Landon in 1936, defeated Wendell L. WILLKIE for an unprecedented third term, and won against Thomas E. DEWEY in 1944.

As an administrator, Roosevelt frequently bypassed his cabinet, relying on informal advisors who held minor posts in government. While he enlarged the role of government through his New Deal, he usually created emergency agencies to implement new programs for fear they would be stifled by the bureaucracy. He met his greatest defeat at the hands of the U.S. Supreme Court, which declared much of the early New Deal legislation unconstitutional. When he attempted to increase the size of the court and pack it with younger, more liberal justices in 1937, conservative opponents of the New Deal—and many liberals—summoned sufficient public and congressional opposition to stop the plan.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF

Roosevelt had hoped to keep the United States out of World War II, which began in September 1939, although he urged preparedness and advocated that the nation should serve as an arsenal for the democracies. The stunning victories of Adolf HITLER that culminated in the fall of France prompted his decision to seek a third term in 1940. Gradually, Roosevelt moved the United States toward belligerency by the exchange of overage destroyers for the right to use British bases in the West Indies; through the LEND-LEASE program, which provided arms for Britain and later the USSR; and by the convoying of supply ships to England. The Japanese attack on PEARL HARBOR on Dec. 7, 1941, and Germany's declaration of war gave him a new sense of mission after months of indecision caused by divided U.S. public opinion about involvement in the war.

During World War II, Roosevelt and Winston CHURCHILL, Great Britain's prime minister, personally determined Allied military and naval strategy in the West. They gave priority to Germany's defeat and, in view of Hitler's claim that Germany was never defeated, only betrayed, in the first war, insisted on unconditional surrender. Although Roosevelt had joined with Churchill in the pre-Pearl Harbor ATLANTIC CHARTER (1941), a broad and idealistic statement of peacetime aims, he insisted during the war on limiting the Allied effort to military victory. He had great faith in his personal powers of persuasion, and, despite indications that Stalin's ambitions in Eastern Europe might violate the Atlantic Charter, Roosevelt foresaw Soviet-U.S. cooperation through a United Nations. Under the pressures of wartime leadership, Roosevelt's health deteriorated. After the YALTA CONFERENCE, Roosevelt, exhausted from overwork, traveled to his Warm Springs, Ga., spa for a vacation in the spring of 1945. He died there on April 12 of a cerebral hemorrhage.

The Roosevelt presidency proved one of the most eventful in U.S. history. In the face of the potential collapse of the capitalist system, Roosevelt ushered in the interventionist state, which managed the economy in order to achieve publicly determined ends. In coming to the aid of Britain in World War II he determined that the preservation of Western liberal democratic institutions was a legitimate concern of the United States. In the process he converted the Democratic party to majority status through its appeal to urban, minority-group, and laboring-class voters and made it the vehicle of liberal reform in the 20th century.

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